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ABSTRACT

Aimed at community planning groups, this guide has been developed to help clarify the role and responsibilities of a facilitator involved with community planning. The booklet maintains that a facilitator's purpose is to help a group reach its own goals and to encourage those involved in community planning to contribute positively. It explains how a successful facilitator is able to transfer the role of primary resource from the facilitator to group members and to transfer responsibility and commitment for the outcome to the whole group. It is assumed that group energy, involvement, and commitment will be directly related to the degree that members adopt and come to own the activities of the planning process. The booklet lists a number of guidelines that facilitators follow to promote group ownership of planning results, including using group processes to focus on a common task, keeping each member on task, helping members to value each idea presented, and encouraging each member to participate and support other members. A brief concluding section discusses locating a facilitator. (Author/JM)

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CHARTING A PLANNING COURSE:

THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

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CHARTING A PLANNING COURSE:

THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

A role description guide for community planning groups that may desire or need assistance to reach their chosen destination.

Council of Educational Facility Planners, International

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This document has been developed to help clarify the role and responsibilities of a facilitator involved with community planning activities. A major portion of the information contained within this guide was acquired as a result of a series of grants from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to the Council of Educational Facility Planners (CEFP) and Educational Facilities Laboratories (EFL).

During the years 1978-1981, CEFP, in cooperation with EFL, developed and field-tested a Planning Assistance Kit which has been successfully adapted by numerous neighborhood groups and institutions throughout the United States. The process contained within the Kit appears to be suitable for a variety of situations.

As the development and field-testing of activities for the Kit progressed, CEFP became increasingly aware that many community planning groups did not understand what a facilitator was or how a facilitator might be of assistance in helping such groups to help themselves — i.e., to accomplish their goals.

It is hoped that this document will prove of value to those considering community planning activities and to those who may assist such processes.

Should there be additional questions or concerns, please contact CEFP, 29 West Woodruff Avenue, #325, Columbus, Ohio 43210, (614) 422-1521.

Wishing you every success in your planning.

William S. DeJong, Director
Center for Community Education
Facility Planning*

*A project of the Council of Educational Facility Planners, International

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PREFACE

Everyone needs help at times. Simply put, a FACILITATOR is a person who HELPS planning groups to complete a task—to reach their own chosen destination.

Whatever the destination — crime prevention or senior citizen assistance program — a new preschool — a social event — the role of a facilitator is to help the people involved develop a course of action that will help them adequately define and accomplish THEIR goal.

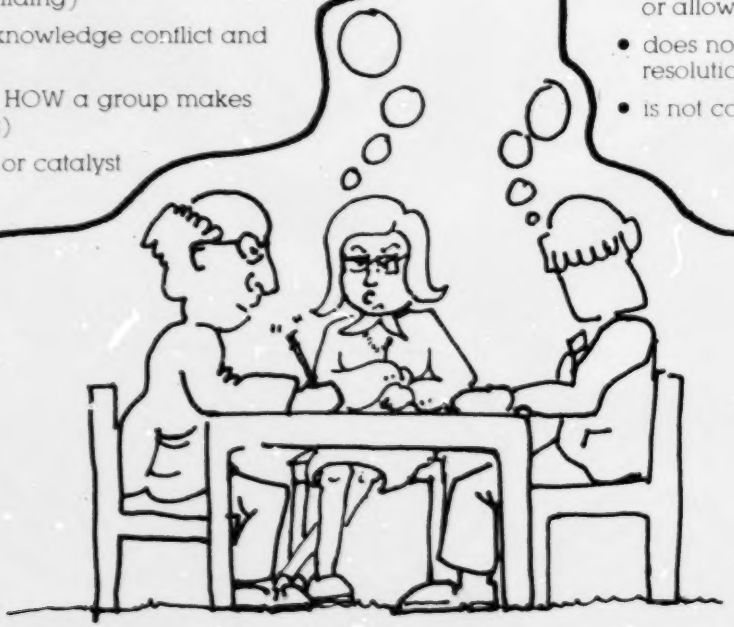
As the facilitator role is relatively new in community planning, the purposes of this guide are to explain the role and how an individual serving in that role can assist planning groups.

We begin our effort by taking a general look at what a facilitator "is" and what a facilitator "is not" . . .

A FACILITATOR

- is group oriented
- recognizes and utilizes the strength in the diversity of group members
- helps keep a group on task
- knows and shares techniques for getting things done (forms, instruments, formats for meetings, workshops, public forums, methods of decision making, etc.)
- encourages individual group members to contribute their thoughts on what needs to be done (agenda building)
- helps a group acknowledge conflict and resolve it
- is concerned with HOW a group makes decisions (process)
- is a group helper or catalyst

- is not self-oriented
- does not try to get all individuals to think the same
- does not decide how a group should proceed with a planning effort
- does not do a group's work for it
- does not interpret information and tell a group what it should do and which techniques it should use
- does not independently determine agenda(s) or allow no room for change or modifications
- does not ignore conflict or decide what the resolution of conflict will be
- is not concerned with WHAT decisions are made (content)
- is not a group savior



SECTION I:

COMMUNITY PLANNING TODAY

The Way We Plan Has Changed

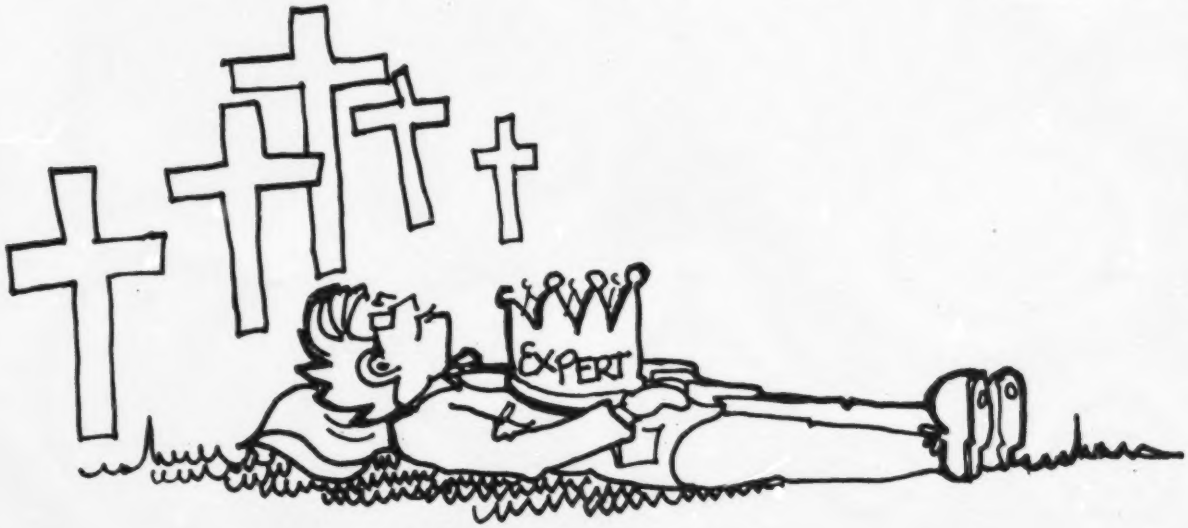
Few would disagree that society today is quite different than it was even twenty years ago.

People are living longer — fewer children are being born — and technology is changing the way we live and work.

Community Planning Has Also Changed

Most people now recognize that they cannot depend on "experts" or "officials" alone to address their most pressing community concerns. The participation of many individuals — with different points of view — is required to meet modern community needs.

Thus, today, we increasingly find citizens, public policy makers and administrators, business officials, service providers and others joining together to plan for their community's betterment.

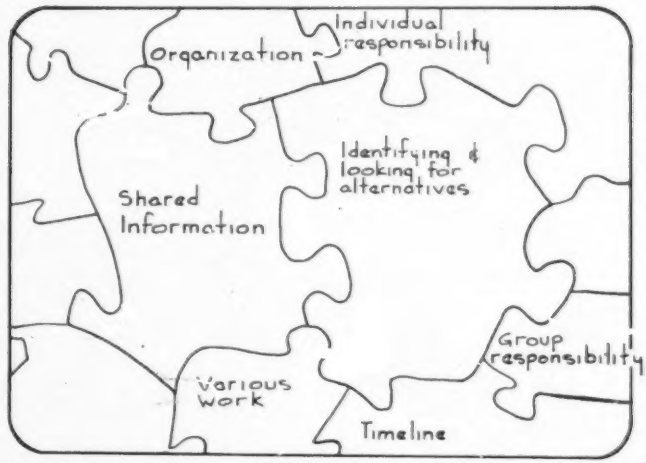


The Facilitator:

The diversity of these new planning groups, and the complexity of the issues they are frequently attempting to address, however, often create the need for assistance — that is, someone who can help these groups of diverse individuals to best use their members' individual strengths and differences to reach agreement. This is the role the FACILITATOR has been designed to play.

A Facilitator HELPS A GROUP TO DECIDE

- how it can best be organized
- its responsibilities to individual members and the group as a whole
- what information should be collected and how that information will be shared with its own members and others
- how various work will be accomplished
- how it will go about identifying and looking for alternatives
- timelines necessary for completion of the task



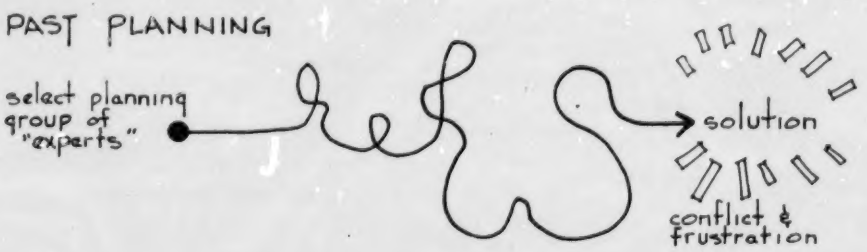
A FACILITATOR HELPS A GROUP TO DECIDE

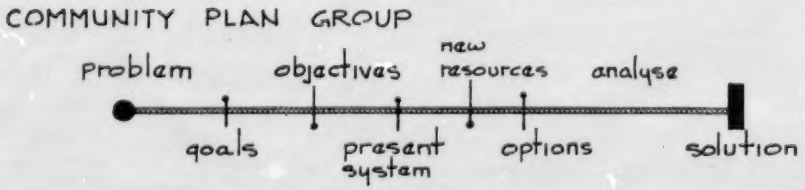
Thus, the facilitator's role is not to do a community planning group's work for it, but rather to assist a group to do its own work by making the most of its, and individual members, strengths.

The facilitator is concerned with HOW a group makes its decisions (process), not with WHAT decisions the group makes (content).

The Importance of HOW Decisions Are Made

The results of many community planning efforts have shown that often a planning group — generally of "experts" or a non-representative sample of community members — felt that it had made the best possible decision, only to discover that others — that is, the overall community, did not share that belief. Then, due to the resistance that surfaced after the planning group's work was done, the decision was either not carried out or met with conflict. The planning group and its members, as well as the general community, felt only frustration.





A BALANCE COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP

Common sense tell us, and research supports, that

INDIVIDUALS WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DECISION OR PLAN ARE MORE LIKELY TO CARRY IT OUT AND SUPPORT THE FINAL RESULT

The important concern then is HOW to get individuals involved so that a decision will be generally accepted.

The Facilitator helps a community planning group to struggle with such questions as:

- who should be involved?
- how many people?
- how representative is the group?
- what kinds of information do we need?
- how can we obtain needed information?
- how is the group to go about reaching agreement or even to know when it has reached consensus?
- how can we communicate with one another and others what we are doing and how they may become involved?

. . . ALL THOSE KINDS OF QUESTIONS WHICH, IF ADEQUATELY ADDRESSED AT THE VERY BEGINNING AND ALL ALONG THE WAY, HELP THE GROUP TO PROCEED ALONG A COURSE THAT WILL RESULT IN AN ACCEPTABLE END.

The Objectives of Community Planning Efforts

A "solution" or decision is only as good as its support. Therefore, there should be at least five objectives for any community planning effort:

(1) To determine whether there are specific community needs or concerns; and, if so, to adequately define them;
(2) To agree on solution(s) to meet identified specific community need(s) or concern(s);
(3) To gain the broadest possible community-wide support for whatever decisions are made;
(4) To carry out planning activities in a way that will use the differences and strengths of those involved to reach acceptable decisions;
(5) To help those involved overcome whatever handicaps they may have in working with each other.

A facilitator recognizes the need for all these objectives. While a planning group and its members may be most concerned with finding "solutions," the facilitator is sensitive to seeing that the other objectives are also met.

For:

- without a real need, there is no reason to plan
- "solutions" must be linked to specific needs
- decisions will only be carried out well if most people support, or at least accept, them
- the feelings and thoughts of all involved must be considered if an acceptable decision is to be reached
- individuals must learn to work together if they want to reach a common good

A facilitator is concerned with assisting to bring about those changes in individual group members' attitudes and practices that are required if the community goals are to be effectively achieved.

SECTION II:

FACILITATOR BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR

Beliefs

There are five basic beliefs common to individuals who assist community planning efforts:

- Each community member has something to contributed to community planning efforts
- A group representative of the diversity within a community is needed to adequately identify and address basic community concerns
- Individuals involved in community planning efforts must be committed to not only their own participation, but also the participation of others
- Community planning activities must be open at all times, allowing opportunities for any and all community members to become involved
- Efforts that concentrate on seeing that individuals arrive at their own conclusions in a democratic and logical manner produce more acceptable results than efforts that concentrate on gaining acceptance for any one individual's — or one group's — "pet solutions"

Behavior

A facilitator GUIDES and STIMULATES

A facilitator GUIDES a group by:

- seeking to establish an acceptable social climate
  - -in which each group member feels free to participate
  - -in a physical setting that is comfortable and conducive to the activity at hand
  - -where everyone is considered on an equal basis
  - -and where everyone has an opportunity to become personally acquainted with other group members
- helping the group to organize itself and determine the procedures it will follow
- encouraging the group to continually evaluate its own efforts and helping to identify where "breakdowns" have occurred
- promoting the group's responsibility to itself and all those involved
- not accepting leadership of the group

A facilitator STIMULATES a group by:

- by being, most of all, an ACTIVE LISTENER who
  - -is not afraid of silence, recognizing that it allows time to think and that eventually someone will speak up and get things going
  - -asks many questions in efforts to make sure all members understand activities and comments expressed
  - -encourages members to restate group assignments in their own words to avoid misunderstandings
  - -when necessary, restates for accuracy, ideas suggested, always checking to make sure the originator of the idea and other members agree with the restatement
- by offering, when needed, other alternatives and consequences for group members to evaluate
- by encouraging leadership from within the group to emerge

A good facilitator desires nothing more than to be "out of a job".

Once a group matures enough to guide and stimulate itself, a facilitator is no longer needed . . . but until a group, and its members, reach maturity, a facilitator is an individual who can provide assistance to foster a group's development.

One major way that a facilitator provides help is by serving as a MODEL FOR GROUP BEHAVIOR.

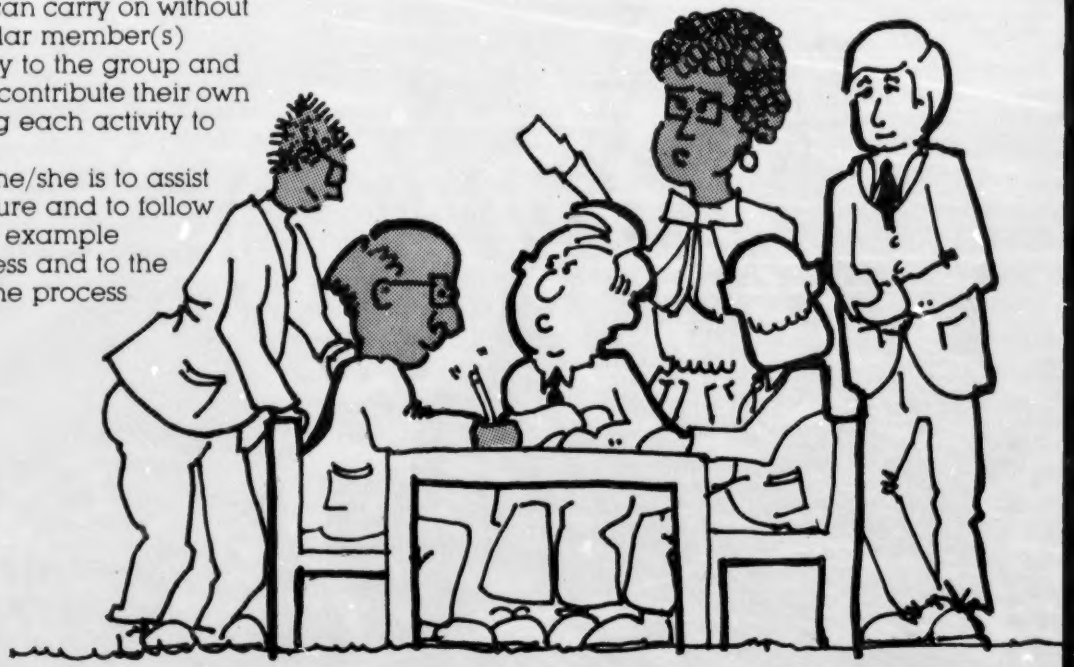
Model for Group Behavior

A facilitator is group centered, believing that the most effective community "solutions" result from broadly representative group problem solving and decision making.

Because a facilitator is group centered, he or she constantly models behaviors necessary for effective group decision making. Therefore, a facilitator:

- encourages the sharing of leadership responsibilities by all members of the group so that at any time the group can carry on without the presence of any particular member(s)
- accepts his/her responsibility to the group and for seeing that all members contribute their own thoughts and feelings during each activity to the group
- is task oriented, knowing if he/she is to assist the group to establish structure and to follow through, he/she must set an example
- is committed — to the process and to the agreements made during the process
- is comfortable with controversy, recognizing that differing viewpoints provide an opportunity for looking at many possibilities
- is a team player, concerned more with the group's performance than with his/her own
- is an active LISTENER, open to new ideas and new ways of doing things

An experienced facilitator is also someone who understands how groups work and the tips and techniques that promote group action. These tips and techniques are a facilitator's "tools", so to speak; and we turn to some of these next.



SECTION III:

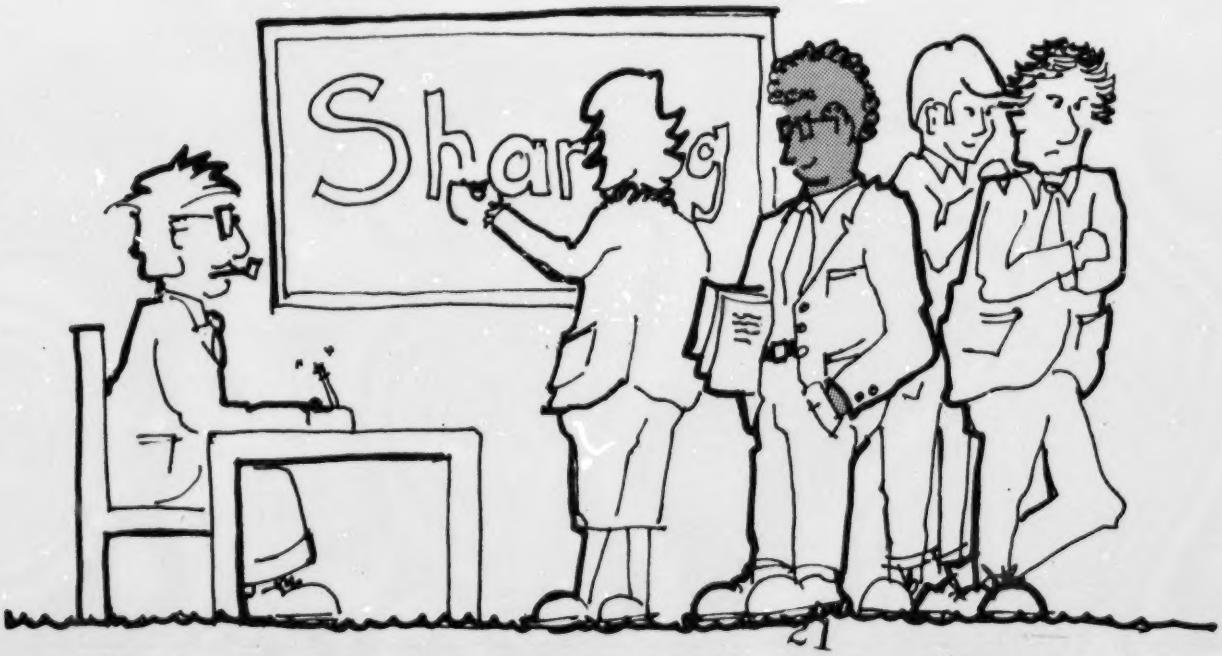
FACILITATOR "TOOLS": TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Helping a Group to Guide and Stimulate Itself

Though often required to fill a designated leader role during the first stages of a community planning effort,

> A FACILITATOR'S PRIMARY GOAL IS TO HELP A GROUP ASSUME ITS OWN LEADERSHIP — THAT IS, TO BECOME MATURE.

From the first moment of his or her involvement, a facilitator seeks to SHARE leadership responsibilities with other group members. A facilitator knows that there are many leadership roles needed to accomplish a task. He or she also knows that each group member is capable of assuming one or more of these specific functions, or of acquiring skills to do so. Thus, a good facilitator seeks to share leadership roles from the onset of the planning effort in order that the group and its members begin to grow.

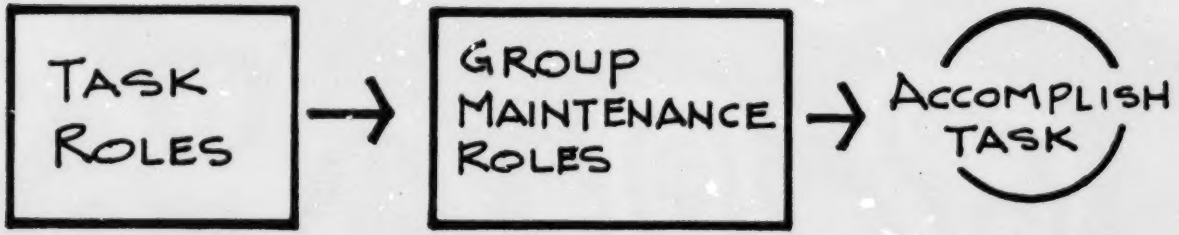


Leadership roles necessary to accomplish a task basically fall into two categories:

task roles
those necessary to reach a decision

group maintenance roles
those necessary for group support and enthusiastic involvement

How many leadership roles will need to be fulfilled varies with each specific planning effort. The important point is that there are both some task roles and some group maintenance roles that must be fulfilled if any planning effort is to reach an acceptable end.



CHECKLIST OF LEADERSHIP ROLES/FUNCTIONS

TASK

- ☐ **Getting an activity started:**
  suggesting new ideas, new approaches, new ways of organizing materials, or offering options
- ☐ **Seeking information:**
  asking others to supply needed information or clarify data on hand
- ☐ **Seeking opinions:**
  getting others to evaluate ideas or procedures already suggested
- ☐ **Giving information:**
  providing the group with facts or experiences relevant to the question at hand
- ☐ **Giving opinions:**
  expressing a belief about the value of ideas or procedures under consideration
- ☐ **Elaborating:**
  building onto an idea already suggested so that it will better meet the needs of the group
- ☐ **Coordinating:**
  relating various ideas so that they become a connected whole
- ☐ **Summarizing:**
  restating briefly the important points made by the group so that none will be overlooked, and so that the group will be brought together in its thinking
- ☐ **Testing feasibility:**
  applying the ideas to real-life situations in order to pretest their effect and to anticipate and avoid mistakes
- ☐ **Testing for consensus:**
  asking for group opinions in a tentative manner to determine if the group is ready to make a decision

CHECKLIST OF LEADERSHIP ROLES/FUNCTIONS

GROUP MAINTENANCE

☐ **Encouraging:**
being sincere to others and encouraging them to participate by being positive about their contributions

☐ **Gatekeeping:**
making it possible for individuals to be brought into the discussion by asking for their ideas or opinions, and, in some cases, by restraining more vocal members so that others have a chance to talk

☐ **Standard setting:**
expressing standards of criteria for group operation which will help the group arrive at decisions objectively and amicably

☐ **Expressing group feelings:**
summarizing how the group seems to feel about an issue

☐ **Diagnosing:**
determining sources of difficulty and proposing the appropriate next steps

☐ **Compromising:**
trying to provide compromises for opposing points of view, raising questions whose answers will eliminate misunderstanding, or offering to modify one's own position in order to achieve group agreement

☐ **Harmonizing:**
draining off negative feelings with humor or shifting to a broader point of view

☐ **Concensus testing:**
sending up a "trial balloon" — a possible result — to test a possible group conclusion

☐ **Following:**
serving as an interested listener while others are talking

A facilitator is also aware that group members will sometimes seek to satisfy individual needs that are irrelevant to the group task and harmful to the group.

In order to eliminate such behavior, a facilitator helps group members to become more aware and sensitive to such actions and their effects on the group.

A good facilitator knows that, with practice, group members can learn to distinguish the positive and the negative behaviors of themselves and one another — and, in time, that they will seek to eliminate the negative if they are committed to the group and to its goal.

CHECKLIST OF NEGATIVE ROLES

- ☐ **Being aggressive**: trying to "put down" one or more other individuals in the group, disapproving of others' contributions, or joking unkindly about them
- ☐ **Blocking**: opposing unreasonably, being stubbornly resistant
- ☐ **Recognition seeking**: calling attention to oneself by boasting, name dropping, or mentioning personal achievements
- ☐ **Self-confessing**: expressing personal feelings that have no bearing on the group or its task
- ☐ **Being a "goof-off"**: making a conscious display of non-involvement in what's going on by whispering, writing notes, engaging in horseplay, or reading something not relevant to the task at hand
- ☐ **Dominating**: asserting authority or superiority over the group by giving directions (demands), interrupting others, or falsely flattering group members
- ☐ **Self-Help Seeking**: taking advantage of the group to try to solve a personal problem or gain sympathy
- ☐ **Special-interest pleading**: disguising one's own prejudices by claiming to speak for "the elderly," "the economically disadvantaged," "the general public," etc.

Once group members become more aware of the effects of these positive and negative behaviors, they often begin to ask such questions as "Was I dominating?" or "Why wasn't Jim brought into the discussion; didn't anyone want to hear his opinion?" Such individual and group evaluation is healthy; and if appropriately done, will lead to both individual and group growth . . . A facilitator seeks to stimulate and encourage individual and group self-evaluation.

Organizing and Managing Activities

A facilitator knows and shares techniques that promote group growth and action, but it is up to a group and its members to decide exactly how activities should best be carried out.

Among techniques that facilitators often suggest are:

1. . . . the use of small groups of approximately six to ten individuals in order to allow individuals to have a better chance to express opinions and their knowledge, and reduce the impact of dominant personalities
2. . . . activities that help individuals get to know one another, resolve conflicts, set goals, and develop options
3. . . . town meetings or public forums, open to all, to promote involvement of more community members
4. . . . forms to solicit responses, clarify issues, rank items, build communication, organize activities, or to record what has happened
5. . . . brainstorming and other non-judgmental ways of getting a variety of ideas expressed
6. . . . methods for ranking, negotiating and structuring discussion in order to reach a preferred alternative or decision
7. . . . processing each session by asking such questions as, "Did we do what we set out to do?" "Was individual participation adequate?" or "How could we have improved our effort?"

SUMMARY

A Facilitator's purpose is to help a group reach its own goals. Techniques and activities that a facilitator suggests are only "tools" for encouraging those involved in community planning to contribute positively to the outcome.

A successful facilitator is able to transfer the role of primary resource from self to group members — and responsibility and commitment for the outcome to the whole group.

To accomplish this, a facilitator helps a group to become a source of support for each of its members. Group growth will occur if all group members (1) focus on the same issue at the same time, (2) understand the issue and agree to its priority, (3) know what work needs to be done (content), and (4) agree on how the group is going to accomplish the work (process).

Group energy, involvement and commitment will be directly related to the degree that members adopt and come to own the activities of the planning process.

The success of any community planning effort depends upon group ownership of outcomes.

In order to promote group ownership of planning results, facilitators follow the following guidelines:

Guidelines For Facilitators

1. Provide activities which help move members toward the accomplishment of outcomes.

2. Use effective group processes to focus on common task.

3. Keep each member on task by encouraging alternative methods and procedures to be tried, tested, rejected or adopted.

4. Value diversity and help other members respect each idea.

5. Encourage each member to participate, and to support each other as a member of the group.

6. Help members understand and improve their own group behavior.

7. Develop techniques and engage in appropriate intervention skills as required by the group's energy level, conduct and attitude.

8. Encourage individual ownership of each agenda by focusing activities on issues meaningful to members as they work toward the group goals.

9. Raise clarifying questions to aid exploration of ideas in a non-threatening atmosphere.

10. Encourage exploration, generation and evaluation of alternative solutions through total group involvement.

11. Display the human qualities of a learner, i.e., get excited by new insights and acknowledge mistakes.

12. Model facilitative behavior and help others to develop the skills required to provide peer support and constructive criticism.

SECTION IV:

LOCATING A FACILITATOR

So your group has decided to seek assistance for its planning effort; now, HOW CAN YOU FIND THE BEST PERSON TO ASSIST THE EFFORT?

The answer varies with each situation.

The assistance you seek could be as near as the man who lives next door to you — or as far away as a woman who works with a community organization in another state.

1 Employees of government agencies and voluntary organizations . . .

2 Private consultants trained in facilitation

3 Technically trained individuals from universities

4 People involved in local community organizations

are just some of the many individuals who often serve in the facilitator role.

Some are paid professionals; some are not.

But all these individuals have two features in common if they are effective:

(1) they are group-centered
(2) they understand how groups work best

Expertise in a given field does not, by itself, qualify a person to be a successful facilitator. To be a successful facilitator, an individual must . . . believe in and value both people and diversity . . . have an openness to new ideas and new ways of doing things . . . be able to cope with controversy and unpleasant situations . . . and be willing to subordinate his/her own expectations for the common good.

The choice between using someone local or from another area — or between using a paid professional or a non-professional — must be carefully made. There are advantages to each.

Local facilitators generally
—are more familiar with the local setting, and many of its political forces;
—have local credibility;
—are cheaper since many expenses are eliminated or significantly reduced.

However, a local facilitator may also
—have more personal biases due to his/her own personal involvement in the local setting;
—may not have the skills necessary to facilitate well;
—have difficulty being accepted by friends and work associates as a "neutral" helper for group growth.

The paid professional will, of course, generally expect some payment for his/her time and involvement. Both paid and unpaid facilitators also have a right to expect compensation for other costs, such as transportation, lodging and meals, that directly result from participation in the planning effort.

Thus, personal biases, perceptions of particular individuals by others, skills and costs must all be considered when selecting the best person to assist any specific planning effort.

To locate potential facilitators, the planning organizers — preferrably a representative planning group — should first of all ask themselves if there are individuals they know who possess such skills and who might be willing to assist. They may also want to contact other groups that have recently been involved in similar planning efforts or specific groups or organizations that deal with community planning.

The relationship between a planning group and a facilitator is very important. The expectations of both must be clearly understood before a specific facilitator is selected. Frequently there is a need to clarify responsibilities between and among planning team members before the actual effort begins. Often, there is also a need to further clarify exactly what the group does, and does not, expect a facilitator to do.

With a clear understanding from the beginning, a facilitator will be better able to assist a group in its efforts; and the group will have a better base upon which to develop itself.

The Council of Educational Facility Planners, International has established the Center for Community Education Facility Planning as a special project. Through workshops, development of a resource center, and technical assistance, the Center will assist local organizations, community groups, and others in planning efforts which address community needs. Topics of special interest to the Center include how to plan, how to incorporate community education in new building construction, and how to convert excess school space into community centers. For further information on community planning, call or write:

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